



Connect: discussion guide

WELCOME: This week we are continuing walking through the Garden of Endearing and checking out the trees. This week we come to the Oak tree – a symbol of our identity in Christ.

The Bible begins in a garden and ends in a garden, and between those two gardens unfolds the great story of God and His people. Our first stop was at the **Tree of Life**, standing at the centre of the garden, reminding us that Jesus is the source of life. We were encouraged not simply to learn more about Jesus, but to **be with Jesus**. We were encouraged to spend five minutes each day sitting quietly with Jesus and meditating on John 15- learning to remain, abide and make our home in Him.

Reflection

- Where does the **Tree of Life** mean to you?
- What was the experience of spending 5 mins each day sitting quietly with Jesus like?

Now we follow the pathway, beside the River of Life, and come to another tree: the Oak.

The Oak stands strong and steady in an ever-changing environment. Isaiah 61:3 describes God's people as **"oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD."** The Oak reminds us that our identity is **imparted rather than earned, received rather than achieved**. Our security ultimately comes not from who we are, but from **whose we are**. We belong to the King and His Kingdom. And perhaps God is less interested in everything we are doing than we sometimes imagine—and far more interested in **who we are becoming**. Like an oak tree, that kind of growth takes time.

1. IDENTITY IS REVEALED TO US BY GOD Read Luke 4:1-2 and 16-21 also Isaiah 61:1-3

Before Jesus begins His public ministry, He is tested in the wilderness. Then, in the synagogue at Nazareth, He reads from Isaiah 61 and declares that this Scripture is being fulfilled in Him. Jesus knows who He is, whose He is, and what He has been sent to do, what about us, do we know?

Discuss

- What connection is there between **identity and purpose** in Luke 4:1-21 and Isaiah 61:1-3?
- Immediately before the wilderness, Jesus hears the Father's affirmation at His baptism. Why might knowing who we are in God matter when our identity is tested?
- Isaiah describes God's people as **"oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD."** What does the image of something *planted by God* communicate to you?

2. WE ARE GOD'S PEOPLE Read 1 Peter 2:9-10

Christian identity is not merely individual. God doesn't just give ME a new identity; He places each of **US into a people**. Peter describes followers of Jesus as chosen people, royal priests, a holy nation and God's special possession. We belong to God and to one another.

Discuss

- What words or descriptions of God's people stand out to you in 1 Peter 2:9-10? Why?
- What difference does it make to hear **"you are God's people"** rather than thinking only in terms of *my* personal relationship with God?
- What does belonging to God's people give us that individual spirituality cannot?

3. WE ARE GOD'S CHILDREN Read John 1:12, 1 John 3:1 and Colossians 1:13-14

John gives us one of the most extraordinary descriptions of Christian identity: **"See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!"** And then he adds: **"And that is what we are!"** Through Christ we haven't simply adopted a new philosophy or joined a religious organisation. We have been welcomed into a family. God is our Father. We are His children. And Paul tells us that we have been rescued from the kingdom of darkness and transferred into the Kingdom of God's beloved Son.

Discuss

- What do these passages tell us has happened to our identity because of Jesus?
- Why do you think John emphasises, "**and that is what we are**"?
- What difference might it make to everyday life - our fears, ambitions, relationships and failures - to deeply know that we are God's beloved children?
- Colossians says we have been transferred into Christ's Kingdom. What loyalties, values or priorities need to change when we recognise that we belong to a different Kingdom?

4. GOD'S CHILDREN BECOME LIKE JESUS. Read 1 Jn 3:1-3, 2 Cor 3:16-18, Eph 4:13-15, Rom 8:29. The Christian life is not simply about **knowing more about Jesus**. It is about **becoming more like Jesus**.

Discuss

- What do these passages suggest is God's ultimate intention for His children?
- According to 2 Cor 3:18, what role does the Holy Spirit play in our transformation?
- Where can you recognise ways in which God has changed you over the years to become more like Jesus?
- If becoming like Jesus is more important than simply becoming busier for Jesus, what might need to change in the way we approach our spiritual lives?

THIS WEEK'S PRACTICE: SABBATH

This week, commit to beginning a regular rhythm of **Sabbath**. Choose a meaningful block of time, ideally a full day, but if that is unrealistic as you begin, choose a substantial and deliberate period and protect it from ordinary work and productivity. Practise four movements:

- **STOP** your work. Put down things that make you feel productive, important or needed.
- **REST** Do things that genuinely restore you physically, emotionally and spiritually.
- **DELIGHT** Enjoy God's good gifts - food, creation, family, friendship, music, laughter, beauty or simply doing something you love.
- **WORSHIP** Turn your attention deliberately toward God. Pray, read Scripture, gather with God's people, remember your life depends upon Him rather than upon your productivity.

Before finishing tonight, tell one another: **When you will practise Sabbath this week.**

Encourage one another to make this not just a one off experiment, but **a weekly rhythm of life.**

PRAYER

Father, thank You that our identity does not depend upon our achievements, our failures, the opinions of others or how busy and productive we can make ourselves. Thank You that in Jesus You have called us Your people and welcomed us as Your children. Help us to hear Your voice above all the other voices that try to tell us who we are. Plant us deeply in Christ so that, like oaks of righteousness, our lives become strong, stable and increasingly shaped by Your presence.

Holy Spirit, continue Your transforming work within us. Make us more like Jesus in character, relationships, priorities and the way we love and serve others. Teach us to stop, rest, delight and worship. We pray for one another; strengthen those among us who are tired, uncertain or struggling. Help each person to know deeply they are loved and belong to You. We pray for our church; may we become a community with deep roots in Christ, growing together, increasingly reflecting Jesus to people around us. And we pray for our world; where there is violence, injustice, loneliness, fear and suffering, may Your Kingdom come. Show us how we carry the love, hope and peace of Jesus into the places where You have planted us. May we become **oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of His splendour.**

In Jesus' name, **Amen.**